

Distinguished Dozen: Dr. Sylvia Hendrix

BY RUTH SERVEN SMITH

Dec 23, 2018



ANDREW SHURTLEFF/THE DAILY PROGRESS Daily Progress Distinguished Dozen-Dr. Sylvia Hendrix

Age: 56

Residence: Charlottesville

Occupation: Oncologist

Personal: Married to Dr. John Hendrix; twin daughters

Pastimes: Bicycling

Dr. Sylvia Hendrix grew up on a cattle farm in North Carolina, but, as a college student, felt she needed to aim for a career easier than farming.

She chose to go to medical school.

“Farming’s a tough life, so I thought medical school might be easier,” Hendrix joked.

Hendrix has been an oncologist at Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital since 1994. As the community hospital has expanded its cancer center and as treatments for previously incurable diseases have improved, though, her commitment to respectfully and honestly guide patients through each step of their care has remained steady.

“Every day I meet patients where the whole fiber of their life has been torn away,” she said. “It’s a tremendous position of trust and responsibility.”

Hendrix attended medical school at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and completed her residency at the University of Virginia Medical Center. After a year in Tennessee, she and her husband, dermatologist Dr. John Hendrix, decided to return to Charlottesville and she began working at Martha Jefferson.

The core of her clinical work, she said, is spending time with patients. In the U.S., appointments with a doctor take 20 minutes on average, according to the National Center on Health Statistics. Hendrix said she routinely spends an hour with a patient who has just been diagnosed as having cancer.

“And we need that whole time!” she said. “We have a lot to get through.”

Her job is to gently but firmly guide a patient through their diagnosis, assess options and make sure they are ready to embark on a treatment plan.

For some, she said, she has to help them understand they may have a short time to live. For others, though, she makes sure they understand that, if they follow the treatment plan, they should reach remission.

“Some are convinced they are dying, and I help them break down that fear and make a plan to get through it,” she said.

She recalled one patient who had spent months with abdominal pain, eventually becoming bedbound. Doctors couldn’t locate a cause and began suggesting that he was imagining the pain. At Martha Jefferson’s emergency room, however, a back scan revealed cancer that had spread into his spine.

“And his response was, basically, ‘thank God, I’m so relieved,’ even though it was incurable,” Hendrix said. “He and his wife were so tired of showing up in the ER and being told their symptoms don’t match with reality; he was just relieved to be believed.”

“Sometimes,” she said, “you give people what you think will be bad news and it turns out to be what they needed.”

Other patients, said Faye Satterly, medical director of the cancer center, drive long distances just to get care from Hendrix. One of her own friends, she said, chose to drive from Richmond for daily treatments.

“It was a lot of driving, but he knew it was the right decision,” Satterly said. The man is now healthy.

Since she’s been at Martha Jefferson, Hendrix said the hospital has expanded and added comprehensive services, including a cantilevered CAT scan table, frameless stereotactic radiosurgery and injectable radium for bone metastases, which all aim to make cancer treatment more targeted and effective. On Dec. 11, the hospital implanted “calypso beacons” into the lungs of lung cancer patients, allowing radiologists to track the movement of a tumor as a patient breathes and pulse radiation only when the beacon lines up with the beam. The hospital is one of the first dozen hospitals in the country to offer this service.

“We can pulse the radiation when the tumor is in the perfect position by tracking the patient’s breathing, avoiding damaging healthy tissue,” she said.

Dr. Cynthia Yoshida, a gastroenterologist at UVa who is close friends with Hendrix, said she admires how Hendrix works holistically with a patient and learns their entire background in order to prescribe the best treatment possible.

“If I ever had to look in the medical record to find a patient’s history, I’d look at Sylvia’s notes, because they were so complete,” Yoshida said. “She’s really hands-on. We don’t have that in this day and age, but the fact that this community has her as a cancer physician really means a lot.”

Distinguished Dozen: Sarah A. Kelley

BY JANE DUNLAP SATHE

Dec 24, 2018



ANDREW SHURTLEFF/THE DAILY PROGRESS Daily Progress Distinguished Dozen - Sarah A. Kelley

Age: 78

Hometown: Charlottesville

Occupation: Pastor and founder of Faith, Hope and Love Church of Deliverance and Faith, Hope and Love International Healing and Deliverance Center

Personal: Married to Raleigh C. Kelley Jr.; mother of Sarona Kelley and the late Raleigh C. Kelley III; grandmother of three

Pastimes: "Free time? What's that?"

Time after time, Apostle Sarah A. Kelley has found herself the first woman, the first African-American or the first African-American woman in work and ministry situations.

"I fight with that quite naturally," the pastor and founder of Faith, Hope and Love Church of Deliverance said. "I was the first black chaplain in the chaplaincy program at the University of Virginia.

"And being female? They had said that a female would never cross their pulpit, and here I come. You still just have to go where God tells you to go."

Her obedience has strengthened and sustained her throughout a 35-year career of ministering to “the misfits, the rejects and the outcasts,” she said. “I just looked forward to it, because I knew what it was like to be a misfit, a reject and an outcast.”

Balancing employment as a computer programmer and licensed practical nurse with her ministry obligations opened up other opportunities to serve and help. And no matter where Kelley went, she never stopped believing that she’d have whatever she needed to get the job done.

“He looks for that availability and gives you that ability,” Kelley said. “The Lord lets us know no weapon raised against us will prosper. He opens doors no man can close. I’ve never questioned him. All I’ve had to do is rely on him.”

When times turned difficult, Kelley would pray “just to close doors you don’t want me to go through.”

Church member Doreen Banks said it’s a pleasure to accompany Kelley on outreach visits. She said Kelley empowers her flock to visit nursing homes to sing and share fellowship with residents.

“The love of God is in her. She feeds the homeless, physically and spiritually,” Banks said. “She’s there, physically and spiritually, for everyone.”

Kelley has volunteered at the Albemarle Charlottesville Regional Jail for almost four decades, and she has served as lay chaplain and sponsored a women’s choir at the Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women.

“I’ve enjoyed jail ministry since 1980,” Kelley said. “Just because you make a mistake doesn’t mean God can’t save you and change your life.”

Kelley and Raleigh C. Kelley Jr., grandparents of three, will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on May 8, 2019. Their daughter, Saron Kelley, is a retired deputy sheriff; son Raleigh C. Kelley III died in 1999.

Her daughter recalls growing up with a mother who never seemed to run out of ideas to help people get back on their feet. Many of her projects involved helping people through difficult transitions, such as rebuilding their lives after homelessness or prison time.

“She opened a thrift store for a brief period,” Saron Kelley said, adding that the store helped homeless people obtain clothing and food. “She fed the homeless out of that, too.”

In even brief conversations, Kelley is quick to give God the credit for projects that worked and those that didn’t. Modesty keeps the pastor from drawing attention to her accomplishments and good deeds, her daughter said, pointing to her long string of firsts — “first African-American female nurse at Martha Jefferson Hospital, first African-American female computer programmer for the highway department” — even outside her ministry career.

“She won’t tell you, but my mom has been a pillar of the community for years,” Saron Kelley said.

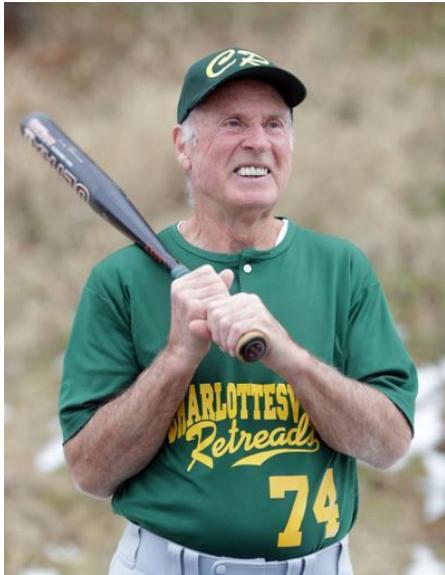
Sarah Kelley doesn’t admit to having any time for hobbies. “Free time? What’s that?” she asked with a chuckle. But her work brings rewards that can’t be beat.

“Just to see people who had been in bondage be made free through God’s word — that’s my joy,” Kelley said. “It’s not my doing. Just to see that God can change their lives and see them bring others to God — that’s my joy.”

SPOTLIGHT

Distinguished Dozen: Bringing people together with softball

BY JOHN HARVEY Dec 25, 2018



In 2002, Larry Stremikis founded the Charlottesville Retreads, a senior softball organization that plays games every Tuesday and Thursday at Darden Towe Memorial Park at 10 a.m.
ANDREW SHURTLEFF/THE DAILY PROGRESS

Age: 75

Hometown: Willard, Wisconsin

Residence: Charlottesville

Occupation: Retired maintenance manager at United Airlines; volunteer manager of the Charlottesville Retreads

Personal: Married to Barbara for 42 years; one dog, Snowy

In 2002, Larry Stremikis founded a senior softball organization to promote physical fitness and friendly competition in Charlottesville.

Now, more than 15 years later, Stremikis' vision has blossomed into so much more than athletic competition. His organization, the Charlottesville Retreads, has created a kinship among seniors that extends well beyond the softball diamond.

“When I wake up the morning of a game, I don’t say, ‘I’m going to play a softball team.’ Instead, I say, ‘I get to play softball today,’” said Jim Mehlin, a Retreads softball player. “[The fact] that senior softball is available is a true gift, a privilege, one made possible by the tireless efforts of Larry Stremikis.”

Hard work is nothing new for Stremikis, a former maintenance manager with United Airlines. After retirement, he turned his attention to his other love, softball, organizing a 60-and-over travel team to play in tournaments throughout the commonwealth year-round.

Stremikis, now 75, ran an ad in The Daily Progress to gauge interest and scheduled a meeting. Approximately 20 guys showed up for the initial meeting at Rhett’s River Grill, including Earl Gore and Steve Cooper.

“No one knew anyone, but we all become friends,” said Cooper, who had recently moved to the area from California. “This was a great way to meet people and some became close friends, and we socialize with our wives.”

The Retreads competed in the Charlottesville Recreation League that first year, playing against teams nearly half their age.

“We only won two games,” Gore said. “But I recall one of those younger guys we played against saying, ‘You guys would have been a great team 30 years ago.’”

A year later, there were enough players to form a 55-and-over team, and league interest has continued to grow. The league expanded to include a 40-and-over women’s league, as well.

“After that first year, we began playing against players our own age,” Gore said. “Those of us who were at the beginning are now in our late 70s and once again find ourselves competing against younger players, the 55-year-old newcomers.”

Stremikis worked with the local recreation department to organize games early to meet the needs of the players. The Retreads play games every Tuesday and Thursday at Darden Towe Memorial Park at 10 a.m. About 50 players come out to play a doubleheader.

“Larry made sure everyone played in the games and he even sat out the game so that others could play,” Cooper said. “On the days when it was very hot, he would hang tarps to protect the dugouts from the sun. He would also bring water for everyone to drink.”

In addition to regular weekly games, once a month Stremikis would organize games with teams from Richmond and Altavista. The teams would eat lunch together after games and most of the time Stremikis bought and prepared the food.

“Larry supervises the food preparation activities and often this is so demanding that he does not get to play in games,” Cooper said. “Don’t think Larry is not a great softball player, but he does focus on food prep at picnics and personally contributes a large bowl of his special potato salad at every doubleheader.”

Frank Robinson, a Retreads player, said the league is more than just competition.

“Our goals are camaraderie, no injuries and running around outdoors for a few hours,” he said. “Notice I didn’t mention winning. Of course, we keep score, but at the end of the day, we’re all friends and scores are quickly forgotten.”

Stremikis' love of the Retreads and the players extends beyond the diamond.

When players were injured or sick, he would check on them regularly to see how the recovery process was going and check back with members of the Retread community to give them the latest.

In 2011, Mel Richardson, one of the original Retreads, died following a battle with cancer. Stremikis coordinated a group of players to attend the funeral and held a celebration of life at the softball field for team members and Richardson's surviving family members and friends. In addition, he had a plaque made in Richardson's honor that is now installed at the first base dugout bench on Field No. 1 at Darden Towe Park.

Prior to his passing, Richardson issued a statement praising Stremikis' work.

"I am so grateful for the opportunity to play senior softball," Richardson stated. "The love and concern of my fellow softballers has indeed changed my recovery in a way I couldn't imagine. This group has given [my wife] Mary and me the strength to persevere when we were pretty beaten down. At times like these, which were few but dynamic, our conversations would drift towards softball and what it meant to hit the ball and run the bases and what it meant to Mary to have your words of encouragement and steadfast support. We all need a community in which to do this, and I have never been associated with a finer bunch of men and women to make this journey with."

Gore estimates that more than 200 players have participated in senior softball in the area thanks to Stremikis.

"The Charlottesville Retreads organization provides recreation and, perhaps more importantly, has become an important fellowship network for all who participated," Gore said. "Before Larry, there was no senior softball in Charlottesville. Now the program is one of the best anywhere."

Distinguished Dozen: Helping others through their struggles

- [By Tyler Hammel](#) Dec 26, 2018



Cynthia Richardson has worked as a peer support specialist with On Our Own in downtown Charlottesville since 2009, helping to find people the support they need.

ANDREW SHURTLEFF/THE DAILY PROGRESS

Hometown: Manhattan, New York

Residence: Charlottesville

Occupation: Peer support specialist at On Our Own

Personal: One son, Kelly, and one daughter, Kelcey

Pastimes: Traveling, spending time with her family

Everyone who spends time with Cyndi Richardson says her optimistic energy and zest for life are infectious.

As a full-time peer support specialist, Richardson has worked with On Our Own in downtown Charlottesville since 2009, helping dozens of people on a weekly basis to find the support they need to live their lives.

“We all have the ability to be happy, to have a life with integrity and peace,” she said. “Peer support keeps us humble, keeps us yearning to reach out to others and meet them where they are and always look for the best in each other.”

Richardson knows all too well how difficult life can be. After her husband of 26 years passed away, she fell into deep depression.

“One day I just woke up, and the depression and all of the -isms that had come on me manifested themselves in ways that made it clear I had to do something different,” she said. “I had lost myself.”

Wanting to better her life and take care of her two children, Richardson picked herself up, and with some assistance, turned to peer support to help others.

“I found myself struggling to find out who I was, what was going on,” she said. “A lot of the time I look at myself as a late bloomer at getting life balanced.”

Not only has she raised compassionate and successful children, but Richardson is now a certified peer support counselor, listening to those in situations similar to hers and showing them the tools they have to improve their lives. She calls On Our Own the “yellow house of miracles,” and she is often asked to give keynote speeches for the organization.

“I show those who are lost that with hard work you can be happy, too,” she said. “We hear that all the time, but I work with folks who don’t believe it, who feel like this is the best life is going to bring them.”

“I’m not looking for them to go to [the University of Virginia], I’m looking for them to be happy,” she said.

In addition to her work with On Our Own, she also accepted a position with the Partnership for the Assistance in Transition from Homelessness in 2010, helping those without homes to build their lives up and find stability. She is also chairwoman of the Service Provider Council.

Last year, Richardson was elected as the board chairwoman of the Thomas Jefferson Area Coalition for the Homeless, a position she was nervous to take at first. But after looking inside herself and to her faith, she said she found the courage to accept the role.

“I owe a lot of who I am to my relationship with my higher power,” she said. “I’m longtime member of New Beginnings Christian Community, and my faith has helped me through some very difficult times.”

Richardson spends much of her free time with her granddaughter in the same Fifeville home her parents raised her in. Though not technically a native of Charlottesville, she has lived in the community for most of her life and was even the first black woman elected as prom queen at Charlottesville High School.

Not only does Erin Tucker, director of On Our Own, consider Richardson to be a “beacon of hope and a pillar of strength” for the community, but she also finds personal inspiration in her life.

A few years ago, Tucker wrote about Richardson for a Women’s Initiative publication titled “Challenge into Change.”

“She is the kindest and most optimistic woman that I’ve ever met. She goes above and beyond on a daily basis in a selfless manner,” Tucker wrote. “She changes lives.”

Anthony Haro, executive director of TJACH, echoed a similar sentiment, highlighting the importance of the work Richardson does for homeless members of the community.

“She focuses on engaging with people living outside, under bridges, in tents, in public parks, etc.,” Haro wrote in an email. “What’s so powerful about her role is that she has a gift for truly seeing each individual, no matter who they are or where they are, and connecting with them in a unique way.”

Distinguished Dozen: Caplin makes a career of rehabbing affordable houses

- [Nolan Stout Dec 27, 2018](#)



ANDREW SHURTLEFF/THE DAILY PROGRESS Daily Progress Distinguished Dozen-Jeremy Caplin.

Name: Jeremy Caplin

Age: 63

Hometown: Charlottesville

Residence: Earlysville

Occupation: Old home renovation and affordable rentals

Personal: Married to his wife, Kari, with four children

Pastimes: Antique light fixtures

Jeremy Caplin's office isn't that easy to find.

If you head to the address he gives you on 11th Street, you'll come to a little green house and think you're about to wake someone from an afternoon nap.

A closer look reveals a path to a little shed behind the home.

It's filled with appliances and hardware. It's a little overwhelming, but Caplin will come around the corner with a big smile to welcome you to the epicenter of his work in the 10th and Page neighborhood.

The 63-year-old Charlottesville native owns about 70 houses in the neighborhood and has slowly been restoring, rehabbing and remodeling them over the past 30 years.

Caplin grew up on Westview Road until he was 6 when his father, Mortimer, was appointed commissioner of internal revenue by President John F. Kennedy and the family moved to Washington, D.C.

Caplin came back to Charlottesville to earn his graduate degree in theater from the University of Virginia before spending a few years in New York City in a professional theater.

Eventually, he returned to UVa to teach in the drama department.

"I started noticing this neighborhood and people I knew lived in the neighborhood," Caplin said.

Throughout his life, the family owned a property in Earlysville. A man who helped with yardwork at the house lived on 10 ½ Street.

"The neighborhood was very rundown then," Caplin said. "Thirty years ago and for the whole century before that, Charlottesville was very segregated."

The area was full of slums and abandoned and boarded up houses.

While teaching at UVa, Caplin would visit the family friend in the 10th and Page neighborhood and the conditions became all too apparent.

"The disparity of the two worlds was so huge then," he said. "It may not be that apparent to people now, but it was dramatic then."

Caplin was discouraged to see the same issues of D.C., which experienced race riots in the 1960s, were present in his hometown.

"When I came back to Charlottesville, I said, 'Here it is in this nice little town of Charlottesville, which I've always loved, has this same group of people who are just shut out of the party and I thought I want to see if I can fix up some of these houses,'" he said

So one by one, Caplin would purchase boarded up houses and remodel them while working at UVa. Once the homes were livable, he'd rent them back out at affordable pricing to people in the neighborhood "to tilt the odds toward the people who needed the help."

Although he had worked in construction as a teenager, it was a steep learning curve. Many of the homes weren't treated for termites, needed foundation repairs, replaced bathrooms and kitchens and few had central air.

One house Caplin purchased had no heating system or hot water heater.

“It was really just seat of my pants. I wasn’t necessarily that good at it when I started to be honest,” Caplin said. “I have re-remodeled some houses that I worked on and gone back. I’ve got a crew now, and these guys are great. You look at something that I did 20 years ago and they’ll ask, ‘Well why did you think that was a good idea?’”

Many of the homes didn’t have dedicated sewer systems and residents used chamber pots. In 1955, the city installed an outhouse so residents could dispose of human waste, but the area still lagged behind in public utilities. Most, Caplin said, were living in “entrenched poverty.”

“It’s so startling to me. You think of that being the old times, you know the ‘20s or the 1800s,” he said. “But that was like during my lifetime. We were living six blocks from here one way, and these poor people were living where the youngest or the lowest rank in the house, their job was to collect this stuff every single day and it just seems so outrageous to me.”

In the 1990s, Caplin decided to quit his job at UVa and begin remodeling full time.

“I just felt like I had done everything [in my job] and was on repeat,” he said. “I didn’t really have a long-range plan as to how it was going to work out, I just wanted to fix something. I wanted to engage with the world that way.”

Caplin now has three full-time employees. The homes are rented for an average of between \$500 and \$600 a month. Caplin doesn’t rent to students or advertise openings because he receives so many inquiries that he’s always filling homes.

He enjoys working on the houses and it allows him to express himself just like in theater.

“It’s creative working on these houses,” he said. “It’s still a good creative outlet.”

Madeline Hawks wrote in an email to The Daily Progress that Caplin has “quietly and tirelessly” worked to restore the historical African-American neighborhood.

“Jeremy’s work has ensured that older residents have been able to stay in homes where they grew up and that their families owned for generations,” she wrote. “[T]he impact that his work and personality have had on the neighborhood should be seen as a model for other citizens.”

Carl Schwarz, a member of the Board of Architectural Review who lives in the neighborhood, has seen Caplin slowly transform the neighborhood over the past 11 years.

Schwarz said Caplin bought houses near him and made them livable again.

Caplin’s work is making an extremely local impact on the city’s need for affordable housing, Schwarz said.

“It’s a small way, but in a sense it’s kind of a big way,” he said. “He’s giving a chance for people with lower incomes to have something nice and be near downtown and in this neighborhood.”

SPOTLIGHT

Distinguished Dozen: Going above and beyond for education

[KATHERINE KNOTT](#) Dec 28, 2018



Valerie Gregory, associate dean of admission at the University of Virginia, has worked for nearly 20 years to open higher education up to underserved and underrepresented students.

ANDREW SHURTLEFF/THE DAILY PROGRESS

Hometown: Dover, Delaware

Residence: Albemarle County

Occupation: University of Virginia associate dean of admission

Personal: Married to Carlton Gregory with one daughter, Jasmine, who is practicing law in North Carolina

Pastimes: Movies/Plays in the theatre, cooking (especially baking) and music

When Valerie Gregory walks across Grounds at the University of Virginia, she's had students call out "Mama Gregory," or give her a hug.

Gregory, an associate dean of admission, has become a mom away from home for students at UVa. She cooks and bakes for students and offers her office as a safe space. Students with whom she has worked over the years have sent graduation photos and thank-you notes that hang on a wall near her desk in Peabody Hall.

“It’s my favorite wall,” she said.

Gregory has worked for nearly 20 years to open the doors of the University of Virginia for underserved and underrepresented students. She’s held workshops for middle-schoolers on essay writing and meets with high-schoolers and their families to discuss UVa.

Once those students become Cavaliers, she continues to be a resource.

“I don’t know what my experience at UVa would be like without Dean Gregory,” said Amare Osei, a third-year UVa student.

UVa Dean of Admission Greg Roberts said Gregory has done more than anyone to shape diversity at the university. This past fall, the university welcomed its most diverse class ever.

“The broader UVa community doesn’t know the little things she does to make this place great,” said Roberts, who called her an unsung hero. “She’s committed her life to opening doors and college access for students who might not see themselves at a place like UVa.”

Gregory leads an outreach team focused on recruiting minority, first-generation, low-income and rural students. She said the team doesn’t just recruit for UVa, but for college in general.

“As wonderful as coming to UVa is, it’s really about going to college,” she said. “I just want more kids to go to college.”

Gregory, a Delaware native, started her career teaching at the elementary level and later was principal at Charlottesville’s Clark Elementary School for a decade.

Her jaunt to higher education was supposed to be a sabbatical. Nineteen years later, she said she never thought she’d still be at UVa.

“I love education,” she said. “I love the possibilities that education offers to people.”

Gregory said she still hears from students and families who didn’t choose UVa but still ended up going to college.

“Whether it’s here or somewhere else, they are now seeing the possibilities of life-changing experiences by being able to further their education,” she said.

‘We all deserve access’

Gregory traces her drive to ensure all students have access to education back to her own schooling in Delaware.

She was in sixth grade when Dover public schools integrated, and she was reminded throughout middle and high school that she should not be there. Looking back, Gregory said that experience nurtured in her the importance of education and access.

“We all deserve access, and I think that was the fire that got started after I went off to college,” she said.

Gregory found escape in music during those turbulent times. She became engrossed in the piano and played competitively. When she moved to Charlottesville to teach, she played in church. Since working at UVa, she had to back off that commitment because her job keeps her on the road.

She spends the fall and spring traveling around the country to work with students. During the winter, her schedule is filled with reading applications.

Admissions work can be data-driven and focused on business. Roberts said Gregory has a knack for balancing the business and personal.

Gregory said it's important to not forget the person behind the application.

"We always have to think that these young people are people, too," she said. "We have an opportunity to influence them to be good global citizens. If I can be even the smallest part of that, if just giving a piece of cake here or there will help that, I want to be a part of that."

'Supported and safe'

Osei and Sydney Williams met Gregory during their senior years of high school. They were applying to the university and wanted to see if UVa would be right for them. For both, Gregory made a difference in their decision.

"She made me feel like I was at home," Williams said.

Osei, who is a cognitive science major on the pre-medical track, said Gregory has been a champion for him and other students. He's continued to work on her admissions team and helps out at recruiting events.

"She makes us feel supported and safe at UVa," he said. "... She always has her door open even though she's always busy."

Osei said he plans to talk with Gregory more over the next year and a half as he seeks advice for post-graduation plans.

Williams, a third-year biology major from Gainesville, found a support system in Gregory, which she said gave her confidence.

"She helped me in a lot of ways," she said. "It's hard being at UVa."

Williams received the Ridley Scholarship, which is for African-American students at UVa and is one of many scholarship programs that Gregory is involved in.

Once a semester, Gregory gathers some scholarship students for a home-cooked brunch at her home.

Williams said the upperclassmen know to bring containers for leftovers.

"It's Dean Gregory comfort food," she said. "Having something like that to look forward makes a difference."

Roberts said the never-stop nature of the profession can make it difficult to work with current students. Yet, Gregory has made a point to be there for the students she recruits throughout their time at UVa. She feels a responsibility to do so.

Gregory said students need to feel that there's some place to go if they are homesick or unsure about their next steps.

"I think everybody needs somebody to talk to," she said. "For me, that's what I want to be."

Gregory has worked for nearly 20 years to open the doors of the University of Virginia for underserved and underrepresented students.

Distinguished Dozen: Leading with his heart on community health

• [BY ALLISON WRABEL](#) Dec 29, 2018



Dr. Larry Gimple, an interventional cardiologist at the University of Virginia Health System, has also worked to teach thousands of children how to swim.
ANDREW SHURTLEFF/THE DAILY PROGRESS

Age: 62

Hometown: Wilmington, North Carolina

Residence: Ivy

Occupation: Interventional cardiologist at the University of Virginia

Personal: Married, two sons

Pastimes: Swimming

Dr. Larry Gimple has put a lot of heart into his medical work and teaching children how to swim.

Gimple, an interventional cardiologist at the University of Virginia Health System, said he always wanted to do work that was important, that made a difference and where rapid scientific progress was being made.

“My generation has been really living in the golden age of learning how to treat and prevent heart disease,” he said. “We went from fellow, which is training, people were wondering what caused heart attacks, and now we can dramatically intervene and interrupt heart attacks, prevent heart attacks, treat heart attacks.”

“That’s about as good as it gets in terms of a 30-year career or a 40-year career,” he said.

Gimple, who learned to swim at a YMCA as a child, became involved with the Piedmont Family YMCA when his sons joined the Charlottesville YMCA Aquatics Club swim team.

“My boys were competitive swimmers, but, being in the competitive swimming environment, we quickly learned that there are lots of people who never learn how to swim,” Gimple said.

Through the Jefferson Area Community Survey, completed by UVa’s Center for Survey Research, [questions were posed to the community about swimming and learning to swim in 2013.](#)

“They found in our region the same thing that others have found nationally, which is that there are many, many children who never learn how to swim, who are never safe around the water, and there are significant economic and racial disparities among those who never learn how to swim,” Gimple said.

There are parts of the community where 70 percent of the children will never learn to swim, he said, citing the survey, and many parents who never learned how to swim also have children who don’t learn how to swim.

“Because I love to swim, and because my boys always loved to swim, and because it’s dangerous not to know how to swim, we became interested in exploring, learning what we could do in the community to help mitigate that,” he said.

Gimple worked with Jefferson Swim League, Ben Hair-Just Swim For Life Foundation and the YMCA on learn-to-swim programs.

“We have taught thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of kids, who otherwise would not have learned how to swim how to swim, with a focus on the community that would not have otherwise learned to swim,” he said.

“Every kid should learn how to swim, and to not have the opportunity, the exposure, is just sad.”

Gimple’s son was friends with and swam with Ben Hair, who died December 2009 in a car crash. Gordon Hair, president of the BH-JSFL, said Gimple proposed he start the foundation in Ben’s name.

“I look at Larry as he’s either my angel or my mentor or maybe even saved my life; he reached out to me with a lifeline when my son was killed,” he said. “I don’t know of anyone that I would admire, think more of or who would so selflessly give to the community like Larry has thorough others.”

When the foundation began, a group of about 60 community members came together to work on the mission statement for the organization.

“Larry put all of that together and never took credit for anything and would not be a member of the board,” Hair said.

Gimple does, however, serve on the board of the Piedmont Family YMCA, and has for 18 years.

“He’s a big champion of community health and specifically access for low-income, at-risk and underserved populations, and his role on our membership programs and outreach committee directly helps fulfill that mission,” said Jessica Maslaney, CEO of Piedmont Family YMCA.

Gimple worked with the fundraising committee for the Brooks Family YMCA and helped to guarantee a loan for the new facility.

“I think what’s unique about him as a board member is he leads with his heart and he’s very passionate about helping people,” Maslaney said. “That translates in how he engages with us as staff and how he engages with community members and the focus areas he puts his time, energy and money in.”

In addition to learn-to-swim initiative, Gimple has helped to facilitate the C’Ville Walks with Heart program, a walking program with the Y, the UVa Heart and Vascular Center and the UVa Cancer Center.

Since the Brooks Family YMCA has opened, the walking program has expanded outside of the summer months and includes walking on the indoor track at the Y.

Gimple also worked to connect the Y’s Diabetes Prevention Program to the UVa Health System.

“You prevent diabetes, you prevent lots of heart attacks,” he said, “Even better than getting up at 2 a.m. and treating them is to prevent them.”

SPOTLIGHT

Distinguished Dozen: Providing children with books, instilling a love of learning

• [KATHERINE KNOTT](#) Dec 30, 2018



Donna Morris
ANDREW SHURTLEFF/THE DAILY PROGRESS

Age: 66

Hometown: Charlottesville

Residence: Charlottesville

Occupation: Retired school librarian, full-time volunteer

Personal: Married to Doug Morris, two sons

Pastimes: Reading, volunteering and eating

The magic starts when you walk into Donna Morris' basement, as she says. The lights flick on, illuminating the shelves, baskets and crates filled with children's books.

The books are destined to end up in the hands of children through the community, thanks to a local nonprofit, Book Baskets. Morris helped to found the organization 23 years ago, and her basement has served as its hub for the last five years. More than 21,000 books were given out this year alone.

The Charlottesville native fell in love with children's literature as an elementary school librarian. She retired from Venable Elementary three years ago and fills her days with volunteer work at several organizations.

"She never stops going," said Doug Morris, her husband of 38 years. "She always has to be doing a chore."

When she's not delivering books through Book Baskets, she's helping at the Schoolhouse Thrift Shop, working to end gerrymandering, maintaining the garden at Venable or sharing information about the Chesapeake Bay.

Morris said staying home after retiring wasn't an option.

"It's my community, and I hate housework," she said.

Morris said she is looking forward to traveling when her husband retires. She'd also like to find a more accessible location for Book Baskets than her basement.

"Over the years, it's been a dynamic group," she said of Book Baskets. "I hope it's around for another 23 years."

For Morris, children's literature is one of her passions. The books become personal to children and help them to learn about other people, she said.

"[They teach] empathy for other people that are different from you," Morris said. "... You fortify or arm yourself with stuff you didn't know."

Edith Wheeler worked with Morris at Venable before retiring 10 years ago. Morris was "the quintessential school librarian," Wheeler said.

"There's nothing she wouldn't do to inspire a child to read and to love learning," she said.

Doug Morris said his wife's lasting legacy will be the children who passed through her libraries and were inspired. She worked at Meriwether Lewis Elementary for eight years and Venable for 22 years.

Wheeler recalled how Morris would transform the school library to coincide with different themes. One such theme was an Arctic wonderland, and white sheets covered every surface, and books of native animals were displayed around the library.

"Learning is a lifetime joy [for Morris]," Wheeler said. "She made it exciting."

At Venable, they worked closely together on projects, Wheeler said. The two still meet for monthly lunches.

Wheeler said Morris' teaching wasn't confined to the classroom or the library.

She said Morris would plan field trips to Jamestown, Washington, D.C., and Sugar Hollow, activities students might not have had the opportunity to do otherwise. She'd also bring along books that tied into the trip, Wheeler said.

“It made extra work for her, but she never minded if it inspired kids to read,” Wheeler said.

Beyond children’s literature, Morris is passionate about water and the outdoors. At Venable, she organized an afterschool hiking club. Throughout the year, the club hiked different sections of the Rivanna Greenbelt Trail, and she taught them about the river and nature.

Today, she volunteers with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. Morris said the most fun she has as a volunteer are events where she can share information.

She asks the children who stop by the foundation’s table about animals in the bay and rivers near them. Not many people understand the importance of the waterways, she said. Now, she’s focused on sediment, erosion and cigarette butts as key issues.

Morris, who owns three kayaks, calls herself a fish. She likes to swim, water ski and be near water.

“We’ve always loved the water,” she said. “It just breaks my heart when I see them turn red and muddy.”

Doug Morris admires his wife, who he said can’t say no.

“Just all the things she does without asking for anything in return,” he said.

Donna Morris doesn’t take credit for her work.

“I am very much a follower and excited to be a part of things,” she said. “... We’re not heroes. We’re people that support our community.”

SPOTLIGHT

Distinguished Dozen: ‘Giving is how I grew up’

- [BY BRYAN MCKENZIE](#) Dec 31, 2018



Charles Alexander
ANDREW SHURTLEFF/THE DAILY PROGRESS

Age: 66

Hometown: Charlottesville

Residence: Charlottesville

Occupation: Motivational speaker, educator

Personal: Single

Pastimes: Walking, visiting elderly community members, meeting new people

It's not that Charlottesville native son Charles Alexander is giving back to his community, it's more that he's never quit giving.

The 66-year-old Alexander, best known to area children, teachers and parents as Alex-Zan, has been trying to make his community a more compassionate, fair and accepting place for decades.

And he's been at the forefront of social change since elementary school.

“I come from a legacy of people who made a difference,” Alexander said. “When University of Virginia students, especially law students, didn’t have a place to go or a place to eat, my grandmother would feed them on Page Street. My mother was one of the mothers of the Charlottesville 12 who worked to desegregate the city schools and she led the 4-H group for years. Giving is how I grew up.”

Events in the city and the nation would reinforce his upbringing. Alexander was one of a dozen African-Americans who were the first to desegregate Charlottesville schools when he entered Venable Elementary School in 1959.

At Lane High School in the late 1960s, he helped to organize racial equality movements and marches in the school as well as cultural events in the community.

He remained a community organizer and activist in the 1990s, leading anti-drug marches through some of Charlottesville’s drug-infested neighborhoods.

But he’s best known for his work with elementary schoolchildren with Club RAPP in the 1990s, which led him to Chicago, Richmond and Atlanta before returning to his hometown.

He now leads annual summer “Think” day camps for children. His latest educational effort, “Close Your Mouth and Listen,” promotes conversation and understanding.

“Over the years, I’ve admired him for his many good deeds and works,” said Patricia Williams, of Charlottesville. “I’ve heard from many others and agree that Alex-Zan is an area treasure.”

Williams said she attended Alexander’s program encouraging listening rather than talking.

“With all the chaos, noise and anger that exist today, it was a relief to be part of [Close Your Mouth and Listen] day,” she said. “Alex-Zan has inspired countless of people of all races with his positive energy.”

Alexander has always been active in the community, from the time he entered Venable school as one of its first African-American students.

“Venable didn’t mold me. I had character and a thirst for learning when I got there, but it taught me a lot about people and race,” Alexander said. “I also had the most amazing teacher, Mrs. Miller, who was a white teacher who really helped guide and encourage me. She would leave messages in my pockets and backpack to tell my mother how my day went.”

When he was in high school, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, bringing racial inequality to the front of social issues.

“In high school, I was more militant. During that time, I started doing a lot of things in the community and with James Fisher, who was a black nationalist,” Alexander recalled. “He was sort of our local Malcolm X. He got us to think more toward our community and making a difference in individual people’s lives.”

Alexander helped with the 1969 African-American Arts Festival and led marches in the 1970s.

After leading anti-drug marches in the early 1990s, he developed the Club RAPP program that helped to instill self-respect and respect for others in youths.

The program called attention to Alexander, who spent some time in Chicago on a TV show before moving to Richmond when then-Virginia first lady Susan Allen invited him to bring the show there. That led him to Georgia and eventually back to Virginia.

While he considers himself semi-retired, he's still working with area children and helping to organize a series of events celebrating local African-American heritage, history and culture.

He hopes the events will draw local residents, as well as University of Virginia students and faculty, especially African-Americans who normally go to Baltimore, Washington or Richmond for culturally significant events.

"African-Americans really feel excluded from a lot of the big local events. I don't feel that was the design in the creation of these events, it's just the way they are," he said. "We don't feel like we're welcome to come."

Alexander said he's spending more time with older community members and visiting his mother, Liz Taylor.

"I'm truly blessed by my family, friends and the businesses that have supported me over the years to the present," Alexander said. "We all need help. A person wrapped up in themselves makes a small package."

SPOTLIGHT

Distinguished Dozen: Serving the Latinx community with love

• BY ALLISON WRABEL Jan 1, 2019



Ingrid Ramos
MELODY ROBBINS/FOR THE DAILY PROGRESS

Age: 47

Hometown: Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Residence: Charlottesville

Occupation: Counselor

Personal: Married

Pastimes: Being with friends, drawing, crocheting and reading

Ingrid Ramos is working to empower the Hispanic community in the Charlottesville area through leadership opportunities and culturally responsive mental health care.

Ramos initially went to school to become an accountant, and worked at a firm in the Dominican Republic for about 10 years.

“I was successful as an accountant, but I realized I really liked to be with people and I like to help people even more,” she said.

“I think that in any field you can help people, but I think there is something about the field of counseling that makes it more; it’s deeper, it’s personal, there is a sense of honesty and transparency that I enjoy in my work every day.”

She went back to school for her bachelor’s in psychology, and ultimately moved with her husband to the United States, where she received a master’s degree in professional counseling.

After moving to the area, she began working at the Charlottesville League of Therapists and now works at The Women’s Initiative, where she is the director of the Bienestar and Resilience programs.

“If it wasn’t for this program at The Women’s Initiative, Latino women wouldn’t really have the opportunity to receive services,” she said.

She’s also continuing the work to keep The Women’s Initiative on a trauma-informed care track.

“The idea is that people already have been through a lot, so we want to decrease retraumatization from the time that somebody makes a phone call to our agency to the time that they go home,” Ramos said.

Elizabeth Irvin, executive director of The Women’s Initiative, said Ramos is incredibly forward thinking, rigorous and strategic in her leadership.

“I believe so strongly that our community is stronger because of the work Ingrid does, and maybe even more importantly the compassionate way that she does her work and the way that she leads,” she said.

Ramos brings a unique, caring, supportive and patient presence to her work, Irvin said, and that is shown in client satisfaction surveys, where clients of their own accord provide feedback.

“A comment from one of her clients is, ‘You saved my life and therefore the lives of my children,’ and comments like this are routine from her clients — she really does create a uniquely caring space for women to find their own voice and heal,” Irvin said.

Ramos co-facilitates Trauma-Informed Cross-Cultural Psychoeducation groups, which began as a partnership between The Women’s Initiative, the International Rescue Committee and Virginia Commonwealth University’s School of Social Work. The program trains immigrant and refugee leaders to provide health and wellness workshops in their communities.

“When you work with culture around immigrants and refugees, you are helping them to look at adjustment in a new culture, how they can deal with those challenges and how to deal with grief and loss in terms of culture,” she said.

Monica Luna, an interpreter for the International Rescue Committee, took TICCP training and has since led workshops in the Hispanic community.

“When you first finish the TICCP training, you don’t necessarily know how to apply all that and how to help people,” Luna said. “I was fortunate that Ingrid started a group with all the Hispanic people that took the TICCP and she put a workshop up and I volunteered as a facilitator.”

Luna described Ramos as a “gentle soul” who’s kind, very smart and knows how to help people.

“She will help anyone. She will go out of her way to find a way, and if she can’t do it she will point you to what way to go and who to ask,” she said.

“When you talk to her, her voice and just her way gives you peace. She’s very soft and gentle and a true friend.”

Ramos serves on the board of Creciendo Juntos (“growing together” in English), an organization that supports Latino families living in Charlottesville and Albemarle County and provides year-round workshops, forums and resources for Latinos and Latino-serving organizations.

She helps to lead Cultiva, CJ’s mental health work group, and the organization’s bilingual therapist group.

“I don’t think we could’ve done the things at CJ without her,” said Creciendo Juntos board member Gloria Rockhold. “She’s been very present all the time and very thoughtful.”

Many Hispanic community members who have been part of the TICCP cohorts have gone on to join CJ’s Latinx Leaders of Charlottesville, Rockhold said.

“She’s been very instrumental in that, as well, just creating the framework and guidance, and she’s just wonderful to work with,” Rockhold said. “She’s dedicated and easy to understand and she’s done a great amount of work for the Latinx community.”

Ramos said she never imagined her life would be this way.

“When I made the decision to become a psychologist in my country, I wrestled with that because in my country, people would look at me like, ‘You have everything — a career, a house, a good marriage — why are you doing this to yourself?’” she said. “I wanted something else.”

“I think that I made a very honest decision. I’m very happy with how my decision turned out.”

Distinguished Dozen: Inspiring young people to lifelong service

• By Tyler Hammel Jan 2, 2019



FOR THE DAILY PROGRESS/ M.A.C. SHURTLEFF Daily Progress Distinguished Dozen - Don Foss.

Age: 77

Hometown: Cape Elizabeth, Maine

Residence: Albemarle County

Occupation: Retired teacher

Family: Married for 52 years; two daughters and one grandson

Pastimes: Gardening, reading, card and board games, inspiring young people to lifelong service.

For Donald Foss, community service isn't just a hobby, it's a way of life.

The longtime educator has been serving his community for decades and inspiring his peers and students to do the same. Through the Key Club and the Kiwanis Club, Foss repeatedly took on leadership positions because he knew it was where he could make the most positive impact.

Born in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, Foss moved to Virginia to obtain his graduate degree and fell in love with the area. After getting married and starting a family, Foss changed careers from mining exploration to teaching in order to spend more time with his family and engage with his community.

“The kids were getting older and I was missing it,” he said.

As an Earth science teacher at Albemarle High School, Foss helped to start the Key Club at the school — eventually helping to grow it to other area schools, as well. Through the club, his students were able to learn firsthand the joys and difficulties of volunteering to help others, be it through cleaning, building, or other community projects.

“Working with students is the greatest joy of my life because they really get into it,” he said. “It’s good if we can get the younger generation to think about service as a way of life.”

By providing an opportunity for hands-on volunteering, the Key Club set the foundation for young people for a lifelong dedication to community service, Foss said.

“Involvement is what makes the difference,” he said. “When a student goes out and does a service project, they come home feeling better about everything and they see what it’s all about.”

However, not only the students were affected by Foss’ work and teaching — many of his colleagues were, as well.

Theresa Tyler, who is now an assistant principal at Western Albemarle High School, worked with Foss at AHS for a number of years before his 2009 retirement. Tyler also helped with the Key Club and came to see Foss as a mentor and kindred spirit in service.

“He always wanted us to do the most service, help the most people in the community,” Tyler said. “He would work with students but he was never going to accept less than the best that you could do.”

A firm but fair teacher, Foss even helped to teach her own children the importance of hard work through his classes, Tyler said.

According to Matt Haas, superintendent of Albemarle County Public Schools, Foss helped to grow the club to nearly 300 students — among the biggest in the area.

Foss specialized in helping students find what they were passionate about by forging a personal connection, Haas said.

“You want students to learn very young that they can have a positive impact so they feel empowered, like they can make a difference,” Haas said. “If each one of them makes an impact on the community, it has an exponential impact.”

After he retired, Foss joined the Kiwanis Club — a service club directed at adults. He has since served as the president of Kiwanis twice and is now the treasurer.

Through Kiwanis, he helps to sponsor a service leadership program that supports four key clubs and a Little League team for adults with disabilities, among other things.

His impact on the students and his colleagues at AHS continued into adulthood, with many of them joining Kiwanis, including both Tyler and Haas.

Distinguished Dozen: Giving the community 'voice and visibility'

• BY BRYAN MCKENZIE Jan 3, 2019



ANDREW SHURTLEFF/THE DAILY PROGRESS Daily Progress Distinguished Dozen - Jane Foy

Age: 71

Hometown: Pittsburgh

Residence: Albemarle County

Occupation: Former radio broadcaster; writer; caregiver

Personal: Married to Patrick Foy; three sisters, five nephews, four nieces, four stepchildren, five grandchildren, four great-grandchildren

Pastimes: Cooking, reading, going to the gym

Once she promoted nonprofit organizations working to improve the lives of others, but now she's doing that work herself.

Jane Foy served for nearly two decades as co-host of local radio station WINA's morning news show, but friends and colleagues say she always made time for people giving time to others.

Now she's connecting directly with those people.

Foy left her daily talk show in September and is currently looking for a "fulfilling part-time job" that will fit with her caregiver's duties for her husband, Patrick. Since leaving the station, she wrote a soon-to-be published book for dementia caregivers and has started a blog to provide support, help and entertainment for those caring for people living with dementia.

The book, "The A to Z Guide for Caregivers of Dementia," lists by letter those things Foy has learned about caring for a husband with vascular dementia.

The blog, atozdementiacare.com, gives Foy a chance to let others know the little things she discovers along the caregiver's path that make life easier and to commiserate on the things that don't go as expected.

"What I found was that there was no book, no blog, no pamphlet, no nothing that could tell you what's going to happen today," Foy said. "It's the kind of thing that you never know what's going to happen day-to-day or minute-by-minute. Just having someone remind you of that is a help."

There are many forms of dementia, from Lewy body to Alzheimer's. Different diagnoses require different types of caretaker involvement, and the need changes as the severity of dementia increases.

"I want to help people going through what I'm going through and give them a little support," Foy said.

"I don't blog every day because I don't have something to say every day. I try to keep it short and light," she said. "I want to help create a sense of community because when your loved one has dementia and you're the caregiver, you don't always have time to go to meetings. If you are working outside of the home and have a dementia patient at home, you certainly don't have time for meetings."

Foy's desire to help hasn't changed since she was on the local airwaves, where she earned a reputation among nonprofit organizations for being supportive.

"She enabled countless nonprofit and service organizations in our region to know and be known by the people who live here," said Meredith Gunter, of Albemarle County.

Gunter said Foy "became a champion for many organizations" and lent support to groups fighting diseases and providing services.

"Jane gave people voice and visibility," she said. "Our community is better for it."

James Peterson, former executive director of the Region Ten Community Services Board, said Foy was always available to help. He said she worked "many evenings and weekends, year in and year out, supporting and promoting efforts" to improve the community and help persons with disabilities.

"Jane was always there, ready to step up and work in any way she could," he recalled.

Now that Foy is spending most of her time as a caregiver, she is looking for new ways to get in touch with others rowing the same boat. Being off the air makes it more difficult to get in touch, she said.

“Caregiving is not a nonprofit organization. Everyone is an individual. I know they’re out there, in Charlottesville, in Albemarle County. I know they’re there, but I don’t know where they are,” Foy said. “I know they’re doing the same thing I’m doing, so how do you say to them, ‘hello, you can come and scream and shout with me on the blog or by email or on the website or anyway that you want to?’ How do you reach out?”

“I think I have something to communicate that is important in a different way. I’m dealing with a dementia situation I didn’t ask for. But maybe I’m doing a service to help people with the situation they didn’t ask for,” she said. “I hope it’s the kind of communication that people feel they can relate to.”